

As the timber harvest moved farther away from the mills, the daily commute for the workers grew excessive. Dierks developed the concept for a roving camp that would house the workers in the forest but which could be moved when the timber had been cut out. The “traveling timber town” idea was born.



A “town” consisted of about 200 homes for 800 workers, and included a school, church, water tower, the company store, and even a movie theater.



Between 1910 and 1968, Dierks’ timber towns were set up in ten locations in Oklahoma, including seven different sites for the Post Office at Clebit.



On “moving day,” houses were cut in half and loaded onto railcars (trucks were used later) for transfer and reassembly at the next town site.

Initially, Dierks’ timber harvesting philosophy mirrored large companies elsewhere - get all merchantable trees from the woods to the mill as efficiently as possible, and don’t worry about the future. However, in 1915 the Company significantly changed its philosophy, and began to leave seed trees to reforest their lands. By the early 1920s, Dierks had begun a fire control program with observation



towers, fire wardens, and telephone lines. They began hiring professional foresters in the 1920s, and worked closely with the Oklahoma Forest Commission (now Oklahoma Forestry Services) established in 1925. The Commission strengthened the wildfire control program and began programs in seedling production and education that helped restore the State’s forests.



For more than 60 years, Dierks remained the largest forest industry in Oklahoma, managing 1.8 million acres of timberland and operating six large sawmills in the Oklahoma-Arkansas region. The Weyerhaeuser Company purchased the lands and operations of Dierks Forests, Inc. in 1969, and started a new chapter in Oklahoma’s colorful forest history.

Forests of Today

Of Oklahoma’s original 13 million acres of forest, more than 8 million acres remain in forest cover. Three-quarters of our forests are the pines, oak-pines and hardwood forests of eastern Oklahoma. About one-quarter consists of the oak-hickory of the Cross Timbers, the hardwood forests along our rivers and streams, cypress swamps, junipers and a variety of woody vegetation that make Oklahoma’s forest ecosystems some of the most diverse of any state.

Forests of Tomorrow

Forests are dynamic and renewable. The forestlands harvested by the Dierks a century ago are as healthy and productive as ever. Using good management practices, our forests will remain so in perpetuity. In the 21st Century, forestlands are being appreciated for all the ecosystem services they provide – wood products, wildlife habitat, clean air and clean water, scenery, recreation, carbon sequestration and other environmental benefits. Keeping forestlands in forest is one of the great challenges facing forest owners, policymakers and the State Forester as we strive to provide the goods and services needed by a growing population and an urbanized society while considering the needs of the generations that follow.

You Can Help

Be our partners in sustaining Oklahoma’s forests for the next 100 years by contributing to the forestry cost-share program that helps landowners plant trees, better manage their forests and keep their lands in forest, and by supporting our programs in forestry education and management. The history of our forests, as well as a book about Oklahoma’s “traveling timber towns,” is featured at the Forest Heritage Center, located in Beavers Bend State Park.

The State Foresters of Oklahoma

George R. Phillips	January 1926 - September 1936
Glen R. Durrell	November 1936 - late 1946
Donald E. Stauffer	Early 1947 - 1969
Albert Engstrom	December 1969 - July 1975
Elmer G. Peebles	June 1975 - August 1977
James W. Stanford (Acting)	August 1977 - Feb 1978
James T. Riley	March 1978 - January 1982
Roger L. Davis	January 1982 - June 2002
John C. Burwell	July 2002 - Present



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The Early Years of Forestry in Oklahoma



A Project for the State Centennial



Forestry Services Division
Oklahoma Department of Agriculture, Food & Forestry

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Forests of Yesterday

Although 100 years span several generations of people, a century is but the blink of an eye for our forests. In recognition of the State's Centennial, it is fitting to reflect on the rich and colorful beginnings of Oklahoma's forests and forest industry.



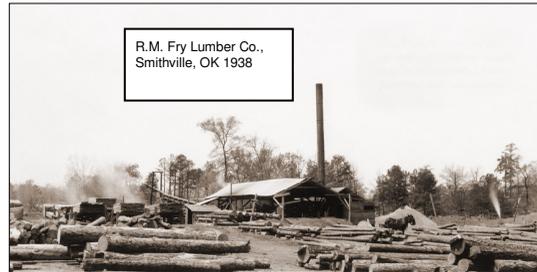
Native American tribes occupied eastern Oklahoma originally some 10,000 to 12,000 years ago. Later native tribes brought some agriculture and burning to the area, as noted by Spanish and French explorers and traders who visited the region as early as the mid-1500s. Subsequently, many eastern tribes were forced to relocate to Indian Territory by the 1830s. Oklahoma's forests were shaped to a great extent by the activities of these early people. European settlement began to increase in the region following the Civil War.

Although sawmilling came to Oklahoma with these later settlers, likely around 1880, it was the Dierks family that actually brought "modern" forestry to the territory very early in the 20th century.

Peter Henry Dierks immigrated to the United States from Germany in 1852, and settled in Iowa, where he took up farming. By the early 1880s, two of his sons, John and Herman, had left farming and entered the lumber business. The Dierks brothers expanded their operations with the railroads as settlement moved west. By 1896, the Dierks operated 15 retail lumberyards in Iowa and Nebraska. As demands for lumber increased throughout the region, their search for new supplies of wood intensified.



By this time, small sawmills were already infiltrating Indian Territory, where a perceived "unending supply" of trees provided lumber, timbers, railroad crossties, barrel staves and other essential products. Surveyors of the U.S. Geological Survey actually noted the locations of many of these mills when they subdivided the Territory from 1895 to 1898.



As wood supplies dwindled in the Midwest, brothers Hans (left) and Herman Dierks learned of vast,



unharvested timberlands in Indian Territory. In 1898, they became involved with a lumber-



planing mill at Petros, a small village near present-day Heavener. In 1900, they purchased a sawmill with dry kilns, a planer and five miles of logging railroad at DeQueen, Arkansas, and began to harvest trees from the area and process lumber for their retail lumberyards that now numbered twenty.

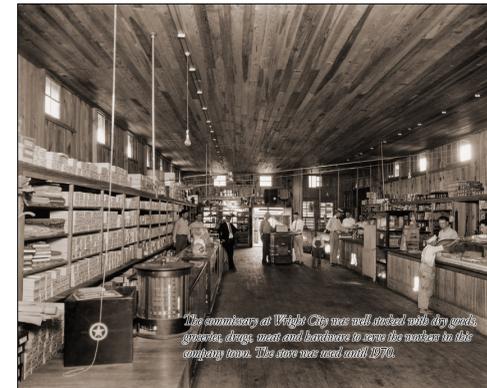
Soon after, the Dierks Lumber & Coal Company expanded its operations into Indian Territory, where it operated as the Choctaw Lumber Company. In 1903, they purchased their first tract of land in the Territory, near Valliant. In 1907, a Dierks survey crew traveled about 8 miles northeast from Valliant for the purpose of locating the site for a new large sawmill to be built at Bismark (renamed later as Wright City).

By 1910, the pine sawmill at Bismark was up and running, ...



... the company town of Bismark was laid out and had its own Post Office...

... and the company store was fully stocked with all the supplies needed by workers in the mills and in the woods.



The company store at Wright City was well stocked with dry goods, groceries, drugs, meat and hardware to serve the workers in the company town. The store was used until 1970.

Felling trees in the forest and cutting them into logs was hard work, accomplished with axes, a two-man crosscut saw and two strong backs.



To move logs from the woods to the mill, Dierks extended railroads and temporary spur lines into the forest. Teams of oxen (up until 1921) and, later on, mules pulled the loaded wagons to the nearest siding.

"Four-Up" mule team with logs at the siding



Dierks logging train hauling a load to the mill